

SUPERVISORY MANAGEMENT AND PROGRAM ANALYST

Student Loan Ombudsman

INTRODUCTION

This position reports to the Chief Operating Officer, Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA) located in Washington, DC. The Chief Operating Officer is responsible for establishing and overseeing a Performance-Based Organization (PBO) to manage the operations that support the full range of programs authorized under Title IV of the 1998 Amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965, P.L. 105-244. The purposes of the PBO are: to improve service to students and other Title IV student financial aid participants, reduce program administration costs, increase accountability; provide greater flexibility in management operations; integrate OSFA information systems; implement an open, integrated delivery system for Title IV student financial assistance; and develop and maintain a student financial aid system that contains complete, accurate and timely data to ensure program integrity.

The legislation also requires the Chief Operating Officer to appoint a Student Loan Ombudsman. As provided in the legislation, the purposes of the Ombudsman are: to receive, review and attempt to resolve informally complaints from borrowers of loans; compile and analyze data on borrower complaints and make appropriate recommendations; and prepare and submit an annual report that describes the activities and evaluates the effectiveness of activities during the preceding year.

The Ombudsman serves as a principal advisor to the Chief Operating Officer and receives and facilitates resolution of complaints from OSFA customers after reasonable attempts to resolve the issues through normal OSFA channels have been made. The Ombudsman provides expert findings, advice and recommendations to the Chief Operating Officer regarding matters pertaining to OSFA program development and operations effectiveness.

MAJOR DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Supervises a staff of approximately 5 employees. Plans work to be accomplished; sets priorities; evaluates performance; approves selections for positions; resolves grievances and complaints; identifies employees training needs; approves/disapproves leave; and promotes team building.
2. Facilitates the resolution of borrower inquiries and problems concerning OSFA performance and program development, school or lender processes, and administrative activities, (e.g., paperwork, obstacles.) Coordinates with program officials to evaluate program operations and activities and to recommend

improvements to existing operations and activities. Makes difficult and complex assessments of the degree to which operational requirements have been met and the degree to which the relative positions of the contending parties have been fairly presented. Prepares detailed analyses addressing matters of fact, regulatory and program development requirements, and problem mitigation. Collaborates and negotiates with OSFA senior management officials and Title IV participants to determine how the objectives of federal requirements can be carried out while ensuring high regard and concern for the customers of the Title IV program. Coordinates with program managers and serves as an advocate for the use of dispute resolution tools such as mediation or interest-based problem solving techniques.

3. Provides expertise in analyzing a broad range of statutory, regulatory, managerial and administrative issues and makes recommendations for implementation of new or improvement in current OSFA program development, programs, operations and systems. Directs the compilation and analysis of data on borrower complaints and conducts trend analyses to determine issues and patterns. Directs the analyses of program development, operations and procedures, including program objectives, work operations, resource allocation and other matters related to OSFA goals and objectives. Based upon analyses, identifies emerging program development issues and recurring problems and develops recommendations for operational and procedural changes to minimize ongoing/future problems. Issues reports, studies and recommendations on actual or potential problem areas, trends, and significant operational accomplishments or deficiencies. Provides the Chief Operating Officer and OSFA managers with regular briefings on operational accomplishments, statistical information and trends.
4. Provides leadership in the development and implementation of cooperative relations between program participants and the Department to ensure that lines of communication are open, that effective dialogue occurs, and that timely, accurate information is exchanged. Advises the Chief Operating Officer on outreach strategies to ensure that information on the availability and functions of the Ombudsman is developed and directed to students, all program participants, and Department employees.
5. Implements, evaluates, and oversees management reporting and other administrative systems to provide timely, accurate case tracking, and to ensure the confidentiality of case information. Ensures the use of the most up-to-date technology for communications within the Office of the Ombudsman.
6. Evaluates, implements and oversees management of a large customer service call center and a large database to track the responses to public inquiries. Ensures the use of the most up-to-date technology within the Office of the Ombudsman.
7. Attends meetings, seminars and conferences on issues related to mediation and conflict resolution and keeps abreast of the literature, research and trends.

8. Performs other duties as required.

Factor 1. Program Scope and Effect

Manages and directs the OSFA Ombudsman Office and staff, providing expert advice on student financial assistance program development and operations. The advice and activities have a nationwide impact on OSFA program development, as well as on the program guidance and work of other student financial assistance participants. The work provides senior management with new, innovative approaches and alternative solutions to resolving issues raised by loan borrowers. As such, the actions, findings, advice, and recommendations of the Ombudsman Office impact the effective operation of all the organizational elements of OSFA, and affect program development, program guidelines, and operations throughout OSFA. Ombudsman activities and results are subject to intense Congressional, media and public attention.

Factor 2. Organizational Setting

Position is accountable to the Chief Operating Officer, Office of Student Financial Assistance.

Factor 3. Supervisory and Managerial Authority Exercised

Plans work to be accomplished by subordinates. Assigns work based on priorities and capabilities of subordinates. Develops performance standards and evaluates work performance. Provides advice, counsel, and instruction on work and administrative matters. Identifies developmental and training needs, and arranges for training. Exercises significant responsibilities when dealing with management and executive officials throughout OSFA and in advising higher level officials in the Department. Makes selections for positions. Hears and resolves grievances and complaints. Recommends awards, position classification changes, etc. Identifies and implements quality improvements to strengthen office effectiveness and promote team building.

Factor 4A. Nature of Contacts

Contacts frequently are made with managers and executives within the Department, including the senior staff of the Secretary, Deputy Assistant Secretaries, the General Counsel, the Inspector General, and General Managers of the PBO and OSFA. External contacts include student loan program borrowers; college, university, career, and trade school officials; lenders; guaranty agencies; loan servicing and collection agencies; other federal and state officials; and Congressional staff. Contacts routinely require extensive preparation and technical familiarity with complex subject matter. Contacts are made by telephone and Internet; and in person, at meetings, negotiation sessions, conferences, workshops, and similar forums.

Factor 4B. Purpose of Contacts

Contacts are performed to articulate and promote OSFA program development and procedures; enlist support from diverse parties; persuade parties with significantly conflicting interests of the need to comply with applicable guidelines; negotiate commitments to resolve complaints; and persuade senior management of the merits of recommendations. Significant tact and diplomacy is required in dealing with a range of parties external to the Department, each of which has a large stake in the outcome of the matter. Internal contacts are performed to obtain factual information on complex and frequently controversial issues or to exchange or disseminate information; to submit reports or studies regarding the OSFA program development and activities, and to provide authoritative opinions, advice, and guidance. The Ombudsman influences and persuades others to adopt approaches or concepts pertaining to issues that are in doubt or conflict. When conflicts arise, the Ombudsman negotiates and/or facilitates compromise on controversies among parties with differing interests and points of view.

Factor 5. Difficulty of Typical Work Directed

Appropriate level of work directed by the Ombudsman is GS-11 to GS-14.

Factor 6. Other Conditions

Position has a direct and substantial effect on the organization and ED's student financial assistance programs (internal and external guidance; operational and cost effectiveness; and program integrity).